ON

THE FLORA OF AUSTRALIA,

ITS ORIGIN, AFFINITIES, AND DISTRIBUTION;

BEING AN

Introductory Essay

TO THE

FLORA OF TASMANIA.

BY

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Reprinted from the Botany of the Antarctic Expedition, Part III., Flora of Tasmania, Vol. I.

LONDON:
LOVELL REEVE, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN.
1859.

17. Though we rarely find the same species running into the same varieties at widely sundered localities (unless starved or luxuriant forms be called varieties), yet we do often find a group of species represented in many distant places by other groups of allied forms; and if we suppose that individuals of the parent type have found their way to them all, the theory that existing species have originated in variation, and that varieties depart further from the parent form, will account for such groups of allied species being found at distant spots; as also for these groups being composed of representative species and genera.

18. No general relations have yet been established between the physical conditions of a country and the number of species or varieties which it contains, further than that the tropical and temperate regions are more fertile than the polar, and that perennial drought is eminently unfavourable to vegetation. It is not even ascertained whether the tropical climates produce more species than the temperate.

19. Though we cannot explain the general relations between the vegetation and physical condition of any two countries that contrast in these respects, we may conclude as a general rule that those tracts of land present the greatest variety in their vegetation that have the most varied combinations of conditions of heat, light, moisture, and mineral characters. It is, in the present state of our knowledge, impossible to measure the amount of the fluctuations of these conflicting conditions in a given country, nor if we could can we express them symbolically or otherwise so as to make them intelligible exponents of the amount of variety in the vegetation they affect; but the following facts in general distribution appear to me to be favourable to the idea that there is such a connection.

There are certain portions of the surface of the globe characterized by a remarkable uniformity in their phænogamic vegetation. These may be luxuriantly clothed, and abound in individuals, but are always poor in species. Such are the cooler temperate and subarctic lake regions of North America, Fuegia and the Falkland Islands, the Pampas of Buenos Ayres, Siberia and North Russia, Ireland and Western Scotland, the great Gangetic plain, and many other tracts of land. Now all these regions are characterized by a great uniformity in most of their physical characters, and an absence of those varying conditions which we assume to be stimulants to variation in a locality. On the other hand, it is in those tracts that have the most broken surface, varied composition of rocks, excessive climate (within the limits of vegetable endurance), and abundance of light, that the most species are found, as in South Africa, many parts of Brazil and the Andes, Southern France, Asia Minor, Spain, Algeria, Japan, and Australia.

20. The Polar regions are chiefly peopled from the colder temperate zones, and the species from the latter which have spread into them are very variable, but only within comparatively small limits, particularly in stature, colour, and vesture. Many of these polar and colder temperate plants are also found, together with other species closely allied to them, on the mountains of the warm temperate, and even tropical zones; to which it is difficult to conceive that they can have been transported by agencies now in operation.

21. The Floras of islands present many points of interest. The total number of species they contain seems to be invariably less than an equal continental area possesses, and the relative numbers of species to genera (or other higher groups) is also much less than in similar continental areas.

The further an island is from a continent, the smaller is its Flora numerically, the more

of organs in plants, where many are present, and where those of low morphological importance may have a comparatively high physiological significance.

peculiar is its vegetation, and the smaller its proportion of species to genera. In the case of very isolated islands, moreover, the generic types are often those of very distant countries, and not of the nearest land. Thus the St. Helena and Ascension forms are not so characteristic of tropical Africa, as of the Cape of Good Hope. Those of Kerguelen's Land are Antarctic American, not African nor Indian. The Sandwich Islands contain many North-west American and some New Zealand forms. Japan presents us with many genera and species unknown except to the *eastward* of the Rocky Mountains, in North America.* So too American, Abyssinian, and even South African genera and species are found in Madeira and the Canary Islands; and Fuegian ones in Tristan d'Acunha.

22. There is a strict analogy in this respect between the Floras of islands and those of lofty mountain-ranges, no doubt in both cases owing to the same causes. Thus, as Japan contains various peculiar N.E. American species which are not found in N.W. America nor elsewhere on the globe, and the Canaries and Azores possess American genera not found in Europe nor Africa, so the lofty mountains of Borneo contain Tasmanian and Himalayan representatives; the Himalayas contain Andean, Rocky Mountain, and Japanese genera and species; and the alps of Victoria and Tasmania contain assemblages of New Zealand, Fuegian, Andean, and European genera and species. We cannot account for any of these cases of distribution between islands and mountains except by assuming that the species and genera common to these distant localities have found their way across the intervening spaces under conditions which no longer exist.

23. There is much to be observed in the condition and distribution of the introduced or naturalized plants of a country, which may be applied to the study of the origin of its indigenous vegetation. The greater proportion of these are the annual and other weeds of cultivated land, and plants which attach themselves to nitrogenous soils; naturalized perennials, shrubs, and trees occur consecutively in rapidly diminishing proportions. I can find no decided relation between complexity of structure and proneness to migrate, nor much between facilities for transport or power of endurance or vitality in the seed, and extent of distribution by artificial means. I shall return to this subject (which I have elsewhere discussed at length with reference to the Galapagos Archipelago†) when treating of the naturalized plants of Australia.

24. I venture to anticipate that a study of the vegetation of islands with reference to the peculiarities of their generic types on the one hand, and of their geological condition (whether as rising or sinking) on the other, may, in the present state of our knowledge, advance the subjects of distribution and variation considerably. The incompleteness of the collections at my command from the Polynesian islands, has frustrated my attempts to illustrate this branch of inquiry by extending my researches from the Australian Flora over that of the Pacific. I may however indicate as a general result, that I find the sinking islands, those (so determined by Darwin's able investigations) characterized as atolls, or as having barrier reefs, to contain comparatively fewer species and fewer peculiar generic types than those which are rising. Thus, commencing from the east coast of Africa, I find in the Indian Ocean the following islands marked in Darwin's chart‡ as bounded with fringing reefs or active volcanos, and hence rising:—The Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, Bourbon, Ceylon, the Andamans, Nicobar, and Sumatra; the vegetation of all which is characterized by great diversity and much peculiarity of generic type: whereas those marked as

* Whilst these sheets are passing through the press, I have been informed by Professor Asa Gray that the Flora of Japan and N.E. Asia is much more closely allied to that of the Northern United States than to that of America west of the Rocky Mountains.

† Linn. Trans. xx. 235.

‡ See his works on volcanic islands and on coral reefs.

atolls or barrier reefs, as the Maldives, Laccadives, and Keeling Island, contain few species, and those the same as grow on the nearest continents. In the Pacific Ocean, again, the groups of islands most remarkable for their ascertained number of very peculiar generic types are the Sandwich group, Galapagos, Juan Fernandez, Loochoo and Bonin, all of which are rising, and most have active volcanos: those with the least amount of peculiarity are the Society group and Fijis, both of which are sinking. In the present state of our knowledge it is not safe to lay much stress on these apparent facts, especially as the New Hebrides and New Caledonia, which lie very close together, and both, I believe, contain much peculiarity, are in opposite geological conditions, the Hebrides rising and Caledonia sinking; and the Friendly* and Fiji groups, equally near one another, and with, I suspect, very similar vegetation, are also represented as being in opposite conditions. On the other hand, whole of the group including the Low Archipelago and the Society Islands, extending over more than 2000 miles, I observe but one rising spot,† namely, Elizabeth Island, a mere speck of land, but which is the only known habitat of one of the most remarkable genera of *Compositæ*.‡

25. Many of the above facts in the general distribution of species cannot be wholly accounted for by the supposition that natural causes have dispersed them over such existing obstacles as seas, deserts, and mountain-chains; moreover, some of these facts are opposed to the theory that the creation of existing species has taken place subsequent to the present distribution of climates, and of land and water, and to that of their dispersion having been effected by the now prevailing aquatic, atmospheric, and animal means of transport.

Similar climates and countries, even when altogether favourably placed for receiving colonists from each other, and with conditions suitable to their reciprocal exchange, do not, as a rule, interchange species. Causes now in operation will not account for the fact that only 200 of the New Zealand Flowering Plants are common to Australia, and still less for the contrasting one that the very commonest, most numerous, and universally distributed Australian genera and species, as *Casuarina*, *Eucalyptus*, *Acacia*, *Boronia*, *Helichrysum*, *Melaleuca*, etc., and all the Australian *Leguminosæ* (including a European genus and species), are absent from New Zealand. Causes now in operation cannot be made to account for a large assemblage of Flowering Plants characteristic of the Indian peninsula being also inhabitants of tropical Australia, while not one characteristic Australian genus has ever been found in the peninsula of India. Still less will these causes account for the presence of Antarctic and European species in the Alps of Tasmania and Victoria, or for the reappearance of Tasmanian genera on the isolated lofty mountain of Kina-Balou, in Borneo.

These and a multitude of analogous facts have led to the study of two classes of agents, both of which may be reasonably supposed to have had a powerful effect in determining the distribution of plants; these are changes of climates, and changes in the relative positions and elevations of land.

26. Of these, that most easy of direct application is the effect of humidity in extending the

* I find that there is a remarkable difference between the Floras of the New Hebrides and Caledonia on the one hand, and those of the Fiji islands and those to the east of them on the other. In the former, New Zealand and Australian types abound; in the latter, almost exclusively Indian forms. The differences between the Floras of Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Tahiti, and that of India, are in species and not in genera, and many species are common to all.

† Mr. Darwin has left Aurora Island (another of the group) uncoloured, on account of the doubtful evidence regarding it, which however is in favour of its being in the same condition as Elizabeth Island. From a list of species communicated by Mr. Dana, it appears to contain no peculiar plants.

‡ *Fitchia*. See Lond. Journ. Bot. 1845, iv. p. 640. t. 23, 24.

range of species into regions characterized by what would otherwise be to them destructive temperatures.

I have, in the 'Antarctic Flora,' shown that the distribution of tropical forms is extended into cold regions that are humid and equable further than into such as are dry and excessive; and, conversely, that temperate forms advance much further into humid and equable tropical regions than into dry and excessive ones; and I have attributed the extension of Tree-ferns, Epiphytal Orchids, Myrtaceæ, etc., into high southern latitudes, to the moist and equable climate of the south temperate zone. I have also shown how conspicuously this kind of climate influences the distribution of mountain plants in India, where tropical forms of Laurel, Fig, Bamboo, and many other genera, ascend the humid extratropical mountains of Eastern Bengal and Sikkim to fully 9000 feet elevation; and temperate genera, and in some cases species, of Quercus, Salix, Rosa, Pinus, Prunus, Camellia, Rubus, Kadsura, Fragaria, Æsculus, etc., descend the mountains even to the level of the sea, in lat. 25°. In a tropical climate the combined effects of an equable climate and humidity in thus extending the distribution of species, often amount to 5000 feet in elevation or depression (equivalent to 15° Fahr. of isothermals in latitude), a most important element in our speculations on the comparative range of species under existing or past conditions; and when to this is added that the average range in altitude of each Himalayan tropical and temperate and alpine species of Flowering Plant is 4000 feet, which is equivalent to 12° of isothermals of latitude, we can understand how an elevation of a very few thousand feet might, under certain climatic conditions, suffice to extend the range of an otherwise local species over at least 25° parallels of latitude, and how a proportionally small increase of elevation in a meridional chain where it crosses the Equator, may enable temperate plants to effect an easy passage from one temperate zone to the other.

27. To explain more fully the present distribution of species and genera in area, I have recourse to those arguments which are developed in the Introductory Essay to the New Zealand Flora, and which rest on geological evidence, originally established by Sir Charles Lyell, that certain species of animals have survived great relative changes of sea and land. This doctrine, which I in that Essay endeavoured to expand by a study of the distribution of existing Southern species, has, I venture to think, acquired additional weight since then, from the facts I shall bring forward under the next head of Geological Distribution, and which seem to indicate that many existing Orders and Genera of plants of the highest development may have flourished during the Eocene and Cretaceous periods, and have hence survived complete revolutions in the temperature and geography of the middle and temperate latitudes of the globe.

28. Mr. Darwin has greatly extended in another direction these views of the antiquity of many European species, and their power of retaining their *facies* unchanged during most extensive migrations, by his theory of the simultaneous extension of the glacial temperature in both hemispheres, and its consequent effect in cooling the tropical zone. He argues that, under such a cold condition of the surface of the globe, the temperate plants of both hemispheres may have been almost confined to the tropical zone, whence afterwards, owing to an increment of temperature, they would be driven up the mountains of the tropics, and back again to those higher temperate latitudes where we now find most of them. I have already (New Zealand Essay) availed myself of the hypothesis of an austral glacial period, to account for Antarctic species being found on the alps of Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand; and if as complete evidence of such a proportionally cooled state of the intertropical regions were forthcoming as there is of a glacial condition of the temperate zones, it would amply suffice to account for the presence of European and Arctic species in the Antarctic and south tem-

86 Pomaderris ericifolia
87 Pomaderris ? sp.
88 Discaria australis

XXII Stackhouseæ

89 Stackhousia minima

XXII Anacardiaceæ

90 Corynocarpus lævigata

XXIII Leguminosæ

91 Clianthus puniceus
92 Carmichælia australis
93 — odorata
94 — pilosa
95 — flagelliformis
96 — juncea
97 Edwardsia grandiflora

XXIV Rosaceæ

98 Rubus australis
99 Potentilla anserina
100 Acæna sanguisorbæ
10. — inermis
102 — microphylla (3)
103 Geum Magellanicum
104 — parviflorum

XXV Onagrariæ

105 Fuchsia excorticata
106 — procumbens
107 Epilobium nummularifolium
108 — linnæoides
109 — macrophus
110 — rotundifolium
111 — alsinoides
112 — microphyllum
113 — tenuiches
114 — olabelium
115 — melanocaulon